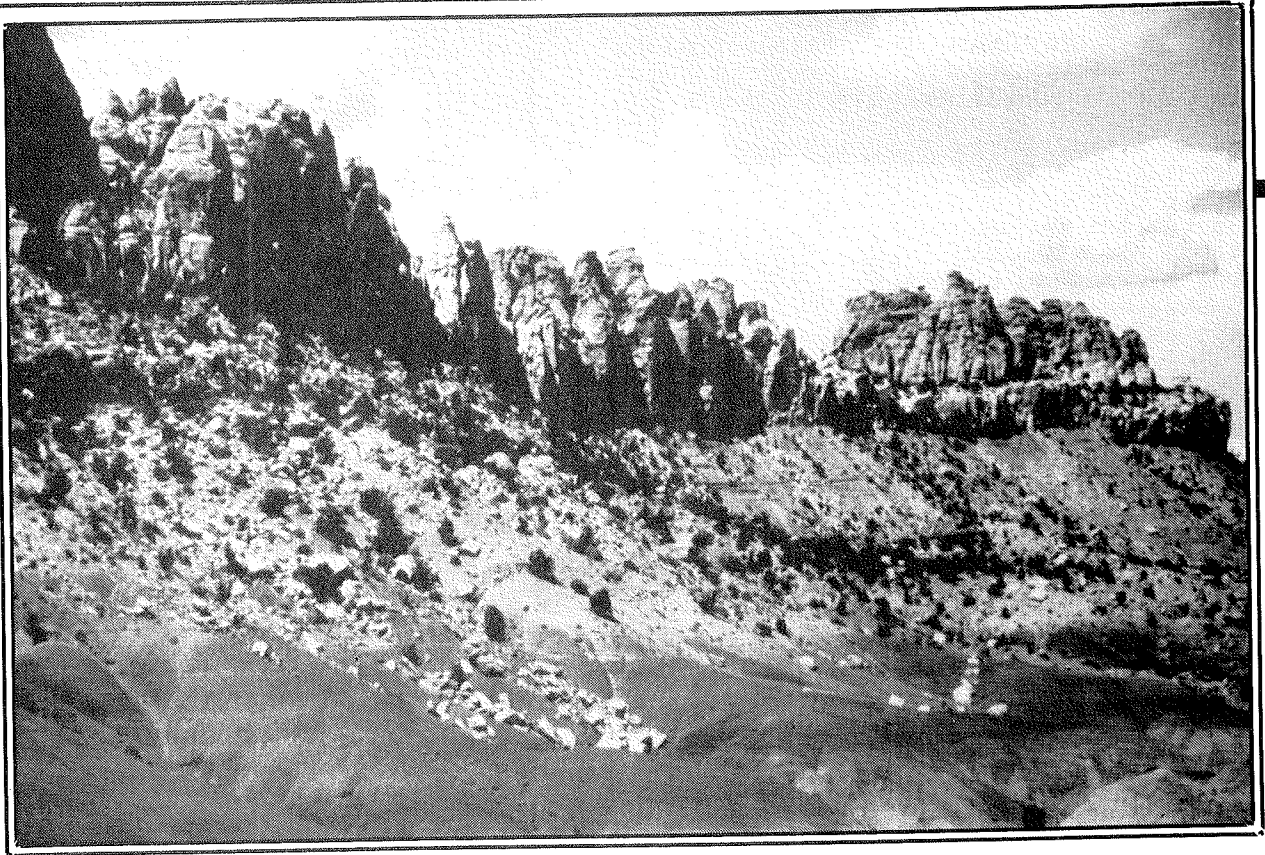


# Steep Creek WSA



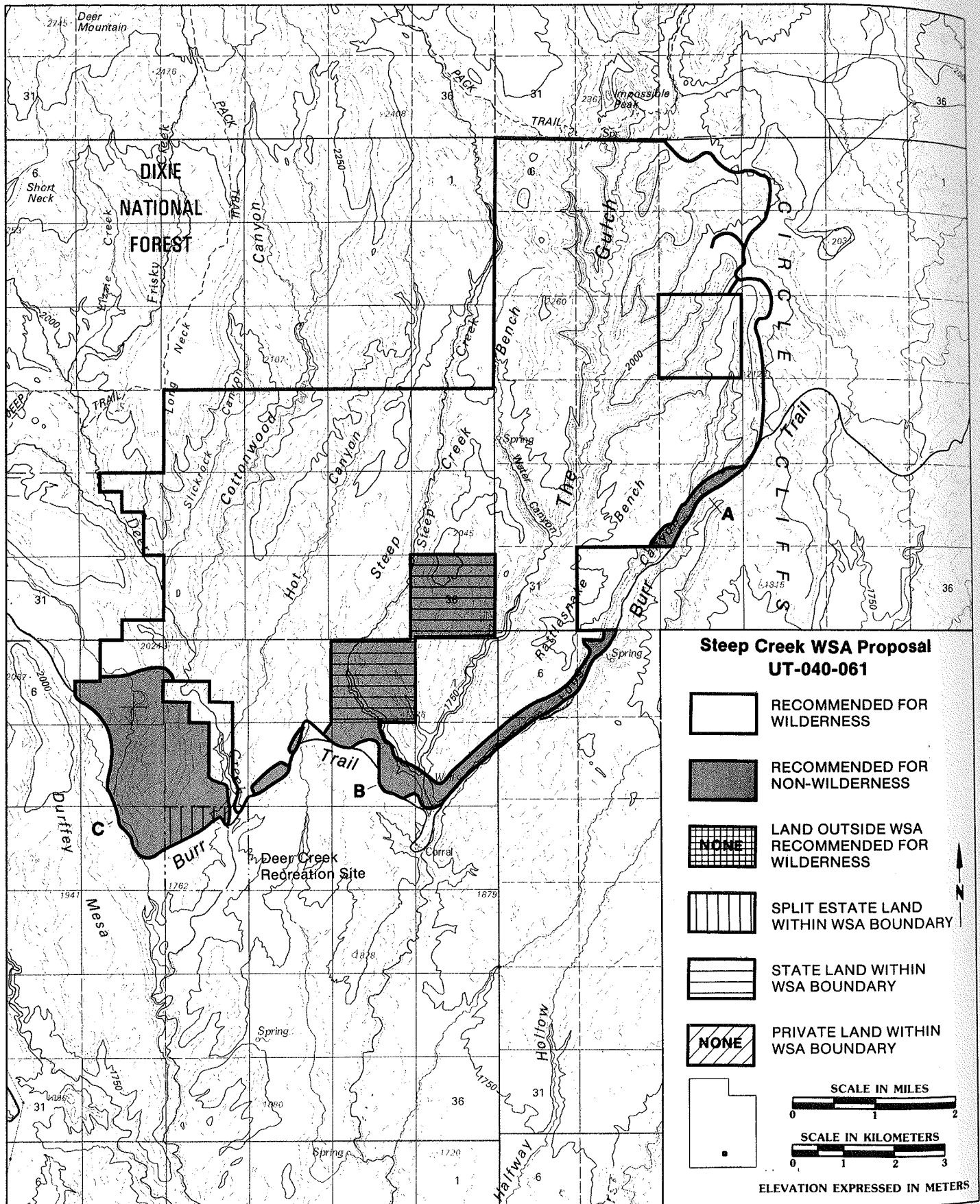
# STEEP CREEK WSA

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# STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

## 1. THE STUDY AREA: 21,896 acres

The Steep Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-040-061) is in eastern Garfield County, about 3 miles east of Boulder, Utah (population 130). The study area is about 9 miles from north to south and 8 miles wide, from east to west. The WSA adjoins the Dixie National Forest on the north. It is bounded on the southwest, south, and southeast by the Burr Trail Road. The western boundary is formed by the Dixie National Forest and private lands. The easternmost boundary is at the edge of the disturbances and human imprints created by past uranium activities in the Circle Cliffs. The WSA is separated from the North Escalante Canyons/The Gulch Instant Study Area (ISA) by the Burr Trail Road (see Map).

The WSA contains 21,896 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Three sections (1,907 acres) of State land are inheld in the WSA. None of the inheld lands would be included in the portion recommended for wilderness designation (see Table 1).

The WSA consists of five parallel, south-trending canyons separated by benches. Numerous winding side canyons and steep cliffs isolate the benches. Fifteen miles of perennial streams flow in the WSA and 14.5 miles would be in the portion recommended for wilderness designation. Elevations range from 5,600 feet where Steep Creek leaves the southwestern portion of the WSA to about 7,600 feet on top of the benches in the northeastern part of the WSA. The predominant vegetation is pinyon-juniper woodland.

TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	21,896
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,907
Total	23,803
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	20,806
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	20,806
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	1,090
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	1,090
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,907

Source: BLM File Data

## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Four alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a partial wilderness alternative where 20,806 acres would be designated as wilderness and the remaining 1,090 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness, which is the recommendation in this report; a no wilderness (no action) alternative; an all wilderness alternative; and a smaller partial wilderness alternative of 18,350 acres.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 20,806 acres  
(recommended for wilderness)
- 1,090 acres  
(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is that 20,806 acres be designated as wilderness and the remaining 1,090 acres be released for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness includes Slickrock, Cottonwood, Hot, Deer Creek, Steep Creek, Water, and The Gulch Canyons and intervening benches such as Rattlesnake and Steep Creek Benches. The recommended area includes the western escarpment of the Circle Cliffs and the north wall of Long Canyon. About 15,500 acres (74 percent) of the 20,806 acres recommended for wilderness have outstanding opportunities for solitude and 12,270 acres (83 percent) have outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. The recommended portion includes all of the opportunities for solitude and 95 percent of the opportunities for primitive recreation found in the entire WSA. All of the WSA is in a natural state. Wilderness values in the recommended portion are considered to outweigh the low

potential mineral values and the potential for improvement of elk habitat.

The portion recommended for nonwilderness includes a transportation and utility corridor in Areas A and B along the Burr Trail road and includes Area C which lacks outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude. Nonwilderness in the Areas A and B corridor and in Area C would not adversely affect wilderness use values or significantly affect management in adjacent recommended portions of the WSA.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute where the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where individual minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. The scenery in the WSA is the most important influence upon the quality of the naturalness characteristic. The WSA includes scenic features such as the Circle Cliffs, The Gulch Canyon, the high domes south of Impossible Peak, and the Cottonwood-Slickrock Canyons area. All of these diverse scenic features contribute to a WSA with high quality natural conditions. The WSA is in an essentially natural condition. Imprints of human activity that remain in the WSA include 2.5 miles of vehicular ways, 2.7 miles of fence, and three existing rights-of-way. These imprints affected a total of 20 acres of the WSA, but they are not substantially noticeable in the WSA as a whole.

Less than 1 acre has been disturbed since 1980. This resulted from a private residential trespass with associated outbuildings and some landscaping which caused less than 1 acre of total disturbance. Upon consummation of due process concerning the trespass, the area will be reclaimed to a substantially unnoticeable condition or the immediate site exchanged, sold, or otherwise removed from Federal ownership. No additional impacts on naturalness have occurred in the WSA.

## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### B. Solitude

Approximately 15,500 acres (71 percent) of the WSA provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. The remaining 6,396 acres (29 percent) of the WSA does not meet this criterion. Opportunities for solitude are provided by both terrain and vegetative screening. Neither the size nor the configuration of this WSA enhance or detract from the outstanding opportunities for solitude in the WSA.

Because of terrain and vegetative cover, visitors can find secluded spots throughout the WSA. The opportunities for solitude in the deep, winding canyons with riparian vegetation are outstanding.

Some benches in the WSA, such as Rattlesnake Bench and East Steep Creek Bench, provide opportunities for solitude because they are isolated by steep cliffs. The quality of the opportunity for solitude on the benches depends on the degree of isolation from the surrounding canyon walls and the amount that the benches are dissected by erosion.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude exist throughout the western portion of the WSA because the canyons are entrenched and winding, with alcoves, narrow side canyons, and dense growths of riparian vegetation.

In the lower Hot Canyon drainage, the landscape is relatively undifferentiated and has little relief and a moderate pinyon-juniper cover. The opportunity for solitude is less than outstanding in this area. In the extreme southwestern portion of the WSA, an almost detached area includes a 600-foot slickrock mesa surrounded by scattered pinyon-juniper and Ponderosa pine. This area also lacks the outstanding opportunity for solitude.

The sights and sounds of human activities are not generally evident within the WSA.

### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for hiking, backpacking, and horseback riding are outstanding on approximately 18,100 acres. Portions of the west Steep Creek Bench, and most of

Long Canyon lack these outstanding activity opportunities.

Backpacking, hiking, and horseback riding are of exceptional quality in this WSA. Each of the major canyons in the WSA intersects the Burr Trail Road, thus hiking and horseback riding opportunities are accessible in each canyon. The presence of a road nearby also enhances opportunities for backpacking, as overnight loop trips in different canyons and on the benches can be conducted from the same staging area along the road. The Gulch is an exception because access to its benches is very difficult.

Although BLM policy does not consider the availability of water to be a constraint upon wilderness recreation, water sources are a convenience to backpackers on extended trips. In the case of extended horseback trips, the availability of water often determines whether this activity could occur at all. Because of the availability of water in the Steep Creek WSA, backpacking is enhanced and horse packing is possible. The limiting factor to horseback activities is difficult terrain rather than water. Most of the WSA, other than several benches east of The Gulch, is accessible to horses.

All of the canyons and many bench areas in the WSA are highly scenic. The portion of The Gulch Canyon within the WSA is one of the important backpacking destinations on the Escalante River drainage because of the impressive scenery of this section of The Gulch. Because seven individual canyons are in the WSA, there are many optional routes available to hikers and riders. This repetitive canyon-and-bench configuration increases both the visitor capacity and diversity of foot and horseback experiences within the WSA.

In general, the WSA is of uniformly high scenic quality, and the same areas conducive to hiking, backpacking, and horseback opportunities are also excellent for photography and sightseeing. The Gulch, Water Canyon, Egg Canyon, Upper Long Canyon and the Circle Cliffs, Lamanite Natural Bridge and its canyon, the Upper Steep Creek-The Gulch divide, and the Slickrock Canyon-Cottonwood Canyon-Upper Hot Canyon all provide

## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

excellent opportunities for photography and sightseeing.

Rockhounding opportunities for the well-known Circle Cliffs petrified wood is limited to the northeastern portion of the WSA where the Chinle Formation is exposed. Approximately 2,300 acres contain exposed Chinle strata.

### D. Special Features

Scenic values are directly related to the geological features of the WSA. In a large portion of the Steep Creek WSA, landscapes are distinctive to the degree that they are easily identified as types. The Circle Cliffs landscape type is found in the northeastern portion of the WSA. This is the best known and recognized landscape in the WSA. Within the WSA, the upper end of The Gulch, Egg Canyon, an unnamed canyon south of Egg Canyon, and the upper end of Long Canyon have attributes typical of this landscape. The landscape type also extends south along the western Circle Cliffs escarpment to Big Bown Bench and is not therefore confined to the WSA. Characteristic features include the intensively colored red, orange, and purple Chinle mounds and ledges at the base of Wingate Sandstone cliffs; vertically jointed cliffs banded with red, yellow, and white colors; and bench tops and upper cliff faces possessing innumerable orange-red Kayenta Sandstone knobs. This is one of the most spectacular and distinctive landscapes on the Colorado Plateau.

The section of The Gulch in the WSA is different from The Gulch downstream in The Gulch Outstanding Natural Area. In the WSA, The Gulch is a deep trench in sheer red sandstone walls. The canyon does not meander and the straightline visual effect is broken only by tributary canyons. The lower two-thirds of the Long Canyon tributary also has these attributes. The drainage divide between the upper ends of Steep Creek and The Gulch is a series of high ridges and slickrock peaks. The ridges drop fairly abruptly to the canyons below. The peaks resemble the adjacent Impossible Peak area on the Dixie National Forest. Slickrock domes on the Steep Creek side of the divide have alcoves and are heavily forested. The Gulch side of the di-

vide is cut deeply by an unnamed canyon containing Lamanite Natural Bridge.

Much of the Steep Creek-Steep Creek Bench area is a distinct landscape type within the WSA, characterized by the straight, shallow Steep Creek Canyon and relatively flat, unbroken benches covered with pinyon and juniper on either side of Steep Creek. This landscape lacks colorful rock strata and offers little of scenic value.

The remaining landscape type is the slickrock and canyons complex in the western portion of the WSA. Canyons tributary to Deer Creek, including terraces, are characteristic of the predominantly white sandstone. Distinct benches between the streams are absent. The concentration of canyons, slickrock formations, and large areas of exposed rock are esthetic elements that contribute to the scenery in this section of the WSA.

The Steep Creek WSA includes several features with scenic value. Lamanite Natural Bridge is actually a large, symmetrical arch in a deep side canyon tributary to The Gulch. The upper Gulch-Circle Cliffs area contains large, unbroken logs of petrified wood. The scenic value of these logs is enhanced by their colorful surroundings. In total, approximately 15,000 acres have scenic special features and values. Within the portion recommended for wilderness designation, approximately 19,100 acres (87 percent) are rated as Class A scenic quality under the BLM visual management system.

The WSA has populations of cougar and elk. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, listed as endangered species, may occasionally use the WSA.

Seven other animal species and eight plant species that are considered sensitive occur or may occur in the WSA. Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.



## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

#### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (21,896 acres). The PNV in the WSA is represented in the NWPS both nationally and in Utah and in other BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

#### B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation Within a Days Driving Time 5 Hours of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)				
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,121,209
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,684,302

Source: BLM File Data.

#### C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Steep Creek WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 64 areas totaling 2,834,115 acres in Utah and Arizona.

There are seven designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA.

In a clockwise direction beginning to the north are the 26,000-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (Forest Service [FS]), the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (FS), the 112,000-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 6,860-acre Cottonwood Point Wilderness (BLM), the 70,500-acre Kanab Creek Wilderness (FS and BLM units), the 40,600-acre Saddle Mountain Wilderness

(FS), and the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being managed effectively to preserve its wilderness character.)

The portion of the WSA that is recommended for wilderness designation can be managed as wilderness to preserve the values now present in the area. There are 2,532 acres in a post-FLPMA oil and gas in the recommended area. However, this lease is subject to nonimpairment of wilderness values and likely will expire and not be renewed. There are 440 acres of mining claims in the recommended area. It is projected that a portion of these and future claims existing at the time of designation would be disturbed for exploration purposes. Wilderness management would be further complicated by the presence of

## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

three sections of State land that would be cherry-stemmed from the wilderness area. Because of uranium potential in the vicinity of the WSA, there will likely be some mineral activity on these lands that would detract from wilderness values in the adjacent wilderness.

Livestock grazing and maintenance of existing rangeland facilities would continue and would not significantly affect wilderness values. Other resource and land use conflicts are not now a problem in the portion recommended for designation and are not anticipated to be so in the future.

In areas A and B that are not recommended for designation, management to effectively preserve wilderness character would be difficult. Development of scenic overlooks, the Deer Creek campground, and backpacker trailheads with parking and overnight facilities along the Burr Trail Road would effectively preclude Areas A and B and much of Area C from being managed to preserve wilderness character. Area C is also isolated by private lands and rights-of-ways from the remainder of the WSA. As an isolated area, Area C would be administratively difficult to independently manage to preserve wilderness character.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) studied the 20,806 acres recommended for wilderness designation and prepared a mineral assessment report for the Steep Creek WSA (USGS Bulletin 1747-B, Susan Bartsch-Winkler, et al., 1988). The report indicates that inferred subeconomic resources of bentonite and of decorative and dimension stone are present in the portion of the WSA that was studied. Petrified wood is also present, but it does not constitute a resource. The mineral resource potential for undiscovered bentonite, oil, gas, and carbon dioxide is moderate throughout the area that was studied, and is moderate for undiscovered uranium in the northeastern part of the area but is unknown in the western part of the area. The mineral resource potential for undiscovered iron, cobalt, nickel, copper, lead, molybdenum, tin, cadmium, strontium, and vanadium is low, as is the potential for

geothermal energy. There is no potential for undiscovered gypsum resources.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 70 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 385 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statement by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 68 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 311 were opposed. Six commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the need to protect wilderness values in the WSA and to complement proposed wilderness in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from other states.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would conflict with or preclude mineral exploration and development, livestock operations, flood con-



## STEEP CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

trol and water rights, public access, or other uses; is not compatible with multiple use; would harm State and local economies; and that designation is not necessary to protect the WSA. The great majority of those opposed were from rural Utah.

Two Federal agencies, the FS and USBM commented on the Draft EIS. The FS stated that the Dixie National Forest concurs with the proposed wilderness recommendation. The USBM did not take a position regarding designation or non-designation but commented that BLM had understated the petroleum potential of the WSA. The USBM also commented that the BLM's Final EIS should include the findings of the USGS and USBM mineral investigations and those findings would be available in November 1988. The findings have been incorporated into the EIS and study report.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are three sections (1,907 acres) of State land in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State considers the WSA to have moderately high wilderness values and moderately low conflicts. Conflicts include potential uranium resources and vegetation manipulation to reduce the problem of Boulder Mountain elk migrating to graze on ranch lands in and around the town of Boulder. The State believes that uranium potential requires further analysis. The State of Utah recommended that the transportation corridor along the Burr Trail Road be sufficiently wide, at a minimum of a 0.25 mile, to accommodate planned future upgrading and maintenance.

The Garfield County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation of the Steep Creek WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. Garfield County previously proposed to the Utah Congressional Delegation that 111,053 acres of BLM lands in three WSAs, including 18,350 acres of the Steep Creek WSA, and 31,600 acres in one

FS unit in the County be recommended as wilderness. The Garfield County Master Plan recommends that the remaining lands in the County, including 3,546 acres of the WSA, be retained for multiple uses.

In commenting on the Draft EIS the County noted that only 250 acres of the WSA would be disturbed if it is not designated wilderness, and nondesignation would continue the possibility of developing oil, natural gas, and uranium. Land treatments to improve elk habitat would also be allowed, to reduce impacts to private fields near Boulder.

# STEEP CREEK WSA

Table 3  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives		
	Recommendation Large Partial Wilderness (20,806 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (21,896 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>The best wilderness values would be preserved overall in the designated area involving approximately 95 percent of the WSA. Naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 28 acres and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 876 acres of the WSA. Most of the impact would be in the nondesignated area. Special features including scenic features, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife associated with wilderness, and perennial streams would be preserved overall. Some Class A scenery could be reduced in quality in the disturbed areas. Vehicular use of 1 mile of way as well as new mining roads in the nondesignated portion would continue to be an occasional annoyance that would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA.</p>	<p>Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 32 acres and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 1,314 acres of the WSA. This impact would be due to mineral exploration, access to State in-held lands, and improvement of the Burr Trail. Special features including scenic features, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife associated with wilderness, and perennial streams would not significantly be affected. Class A scenery would be reduced in quality in the disturbed areas. Vehicular use of 2.5 miles of way and future mining roads would be an occasional annoyance that would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would preserve overall the wilderness values in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 28 acres and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 876 acres of the WSA. This impact would be due to mineral exploration, access to State in-held lands, and improvement of the Burr Trail. Special features including scenic features, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife associated with wilderness and perennial streams would be preserved overall. Class A scenery would be reduced in quality in the disturbed areas.</p>
			Small Partial Wilderness (18,350 Acres)
			<p>The best wilderness values would be protected in the designated area involving approximately 84 percent of the WSA. Naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 32 acres and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 1,095 acres of the WSA. Most of the impact would be in the nondesignated area. Special features including scenic features, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife associated with wilderness and perennial streams would be preserved overall in the designated area. Class A scenery could be reduced in quality where disturbance occurs. Vehicular use of 1 mile of way as well as new mining roads in the nondesignated areas would be an occasional annoyance that would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA.</p>

## STEEP CREEK WSA

Table 3 (Continued)  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives			
	Recommendation Large Partial Wilderness (20,806 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (21,896 Acres)	Small Partial Wilderness (18,350 Acres)
Impacts on Water Resources	The impacts and conclusions on water would be essentially the same as with the All Wilderness Alternative because the level of surface disturbance would be the same and the perennial streams would pass through the designated area.	The No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not alter present or future water quality or uses because projected surface disturbance would be minor (32 acres) and would not significantly increase sediment yield and water could be utilized without consideration of wilderness values.	In the short term, wilderness designation would not significantly alter water quality or uses. In the long term, future water diversions and new and consumptive uses in the Escalante River system upstream of the WSA may be restricted or precluded in order to protect resource values in the wilderness.	The impacts and conclusions on water would be essentially the same as with the All Wilderness Alternative because the level of surface disturbance would be approximately the same and the perennial streams would pass through the designated areas.
Impact on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production	Within the designated area, potential exploration opportunities for locatable minerals would be limited to claims existing at the time of designation. No significant minerals production would be foregone because the probability of development is low even if the WSA is not designated wilderness.	Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral and energy resource exploration and production in the Steep Creek WSA because minerals could be leased, claimed and developed as at present.	Wilderness designation would limit potential exploration opportunities for locatable minerals to those under valid mining claims at the time of designation. No significant mineral production would be foregone because the probability of development is low even if the WSA is not designated wilderness.	Mineral exploration would not be limited in the area considered to possess the most potential for locatable minerals. No significant impacts would occur to mineral and energy resource exploration and production because the probability of development is low even if the WSA is not designated wilderness.

## STEEP CREEK WSA

Table 3 (Continued)  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives		
	Recommendation Large Partial Wilderness (20,806 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness (21,896 Acres)	Small Partial Wilderness (18,350 Acres)
Impacts on Wildlife Habitat and Populations	<p>The impacts and conclusions with this alternative are essentially the same as those with the All Wilderness Alternative. The partial designation would preclude the opportunities to improve needed habitat on elk winter range. Designation would protect all species and provide additional solitude on 95 percent (20,806 acres) of the WSA. There would be no significant impacts to special status species because of required mitigation and because only 0.13 percent (28 acres) of the habitat in the WSA would be disturbed.</p>	<p>There would be no significant impacts to wildlife habitat or populations including special status animal species because only 0.15 percent (32 acres) of the habitat in the WSA would be disturbed.</p> <p>Wilderness designation would preclude the opportunity to improve needed habitat on elk winter range. Designation would protect all species and provide additional solitude. There would be no significant impacts to special status species because required mitigation and because only 0.13 percent (28 acres) of the habitat in the WSA would be disturbed.</p>	<p>Partial wilderness designation with this alternative would preclude the opportunity to improve needed habitat on elk winter range. Designation would protect all species with additional solitude on 83 percent (18,174 acres) of the WSA. There would be no significant impacts to special status species because of required mitigation and because only 0.15 percent (32 acres) of the habitat in the WSA would be disturbed.</p>